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SUBJECT: TRANSFORMATIONAL DIPLOMACY: THE GOM AND POLITICAL
POLLING

REF: A. RABAT 00308

[1](#)B. RABAT 01329

[1](#)1. (U) This cable is sensitive but unclassified. Please
protect accordingly.

[1](#)2. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Ambassador, accompanied by Sarah Johnson, resident country director of the International Republican Institute (IRI), and Emboffs met with Abdelaziz Meziane Belfkih, one of the king's advisors, on July 24 and with Youssef Amrani, MFA Director of Bilateral Affairs, on July 31, to preview the second IRI political opinion poll to the GOM. As the first IRI poll (reftel A) had garnered extensive media coverage and criticism, the Ambassador requested these meetings to ensure that Moroccan officials received a first-hand appreciation of IRI's objectives, which are to promote democratic techniques, and to describe scientific approaches to polling, as well as to discuss specific results of the second poll. These meetings with key GOM officials served as an initial step in the Mission's 2007 parliamentary election strategy. The Ambassador expressed the USG's continuing support for Morocco's democratic evolution and highlighted the importance, as well as normalcy, of scientifically valid polling as a tool for political parties in their attempts to gain votes. Polling, said the Ambassador, is a common instrument in the arsenal of tools used in election preparation. End Summary.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Responding to the GOM's stated commitment to a more democratic Morocco, meetings with Belfkih and Amrani were arranged in order to ensure a clear understanding of IRI's objectives, and to kick off engagement with the GOM in the execution of the Mission's 2007 parliamentary election strategy.

[1](#)4. (SBU) The poll, undertaken by the independent Moroccan polling and marketing firm, LMS-CSA, was commissioned by IRI under its MEPI-financed cooperative agreement under USAID's Consortium for Electoral and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) in order to demonstrate polling as a political technique which informs the development of party platforms and establishes a basis for attracting voters. LMS-CSA was recognized by both Belfkih and Amrani as a reputable firm. For the discussion, IRI provided Belfkih and Amrani a set of the slides which will be used by IRI in training sessions for political parties. In both briefings, IRI underlined the importance of the poll is the process or methodology, not the actual results. The technique and methodological uses of the poll will be communicated to the political parties during

training sessions.

The Belfkih Meeting

¶15. (SBU) Belfkih was clearly pleased to have been provided an advance briefing. In discussing political party identification, Belfkih said that, in the Moroccan context, self-identifiers are "militants" or "activists," who follow a party "blindly."

¶16. (SBU) The IRI results, according to Belfkih, track well with the results of other polls that have been taken in Morocco. Belfkih was not surprised by the low number of Moroccans whose concerns were social justice (four percent) and the protection of rights and liberties (four percent). He pointed out that Moroccans perceived the availability of employment as their main concern (79 percent) in the poll and that it probably means social justice to them, i.e., social justice and employment are linked. In the IRI presentation, the responsibility for resolving the unemployment problem rests with the government (38 percent) and the Minister of Employment (43 percent).

¶17. (SBU) Belfkih was most interested in the prospects for the political parties. He wanted to know the potential strength of the Party of Justice and Development (PJD), which received 46 percent in the hypothetical vote question (NOTE: The poll found that of the 1071 respondents likely to be voters, nine percent said outright they would vote for the PJD. Of the 55 percent of voters who were undecided, 66 percent said they would "lean" toward the PJD, resulting in the 46 percent figure. END NOTE.). Johnson informed Belfkih

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that the PJD markets itself, develops political messages that seem to resonate with the "common man," and it defines its political mission.

¶18. (SBU) The IRI poll indicated that eight percent of the likely voters did not support any party, with one percent likely to cast a blank ballot. Belfkih was extremely interested in what the poll interpretation was not saying, i.e., that further analysis of the data might reveal more information. He suspected that the Justice and Charity Organization (JCO) might be captured in the eight percent.

The Amrani Meeting

¶19. (SBU) Amrani, because of the issues covered in the poll, suggested that IRI provide a similar presentation to the Ministry of Interior (MOI) prior to presenting the poll to the political parties. "It is better to have the MOI informed of the poll and its intentions in order to avoid any misunderstandings down the road," Amrani explained.

¶10. (SBU) Discussing the sample used for the poll, Amrani was glad to hear that respondents were representative of Morocco's population. He highlighted that 48 percent of the 1500 total respondents for this iteration of the poll were illiterate, which he said is "the reality of Morocco." Amrani did not appear surprised by the slide showing jobs and unemployment as the main concern of respondents, and explained that, although an overwhelming majority of respondents said it is the responsibility of the "state" to create jobs, creating public sector jobs is "anti-World Bank" and not in the best interest of the economy. Amrani added that "it is illogical that people think the government must create more public sector jobs."

¶11. (SBU) Amrani explained that, in his view, the slide showing the percentage of likely voters (72 percent) for the next round of parliamentary elections may be inaccurate and

misleading. Speaking personally as a Moroccan and "not for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs," Amrani said that Morocco has a long history of citizens losing confidence in elections, and that the high number of potential voters may be a result of the economic situation in certain regions. As crop production rises, so does peoples' sense that their economic situation is doing well, which makes people more likely to want to vote, he explained.

¶12. (SBU) Turning to potential prospects for the political parties, Amrani was seized by the presentation that an overwhelming majority of undecided voters are leaning towards the PJD. Amrani said the results of this poll will be an important tool for political parties to use in order to react to the concerns of the population. Amrani asked how the political parties were integrated into the process of the poll. He wondered if the political parties played a role in the crafting of the questions for the poll. Amrani was pleased that the political parties had a chance to recommend questions for the second poll questionnaire. Responding to Amrani's question about the reasoning behind the commissioning of the poll by IRI, Ambassador stressed that public opinion polling is an important tool that provides useful and relevant information for political parties to use as they devise platforms and strategies.

¶13. (SBU) Again speaking unofficially, Amrani said, unfortunately, should the results of the second poll reach the press that the press will focus solely on the results showing 46 percent of potential voters leaning towards the PJD. Amrani said, in his view, that this will create a large national debate and that people "will attack the poll" asking "what is behind the poll." Continuing his "personal" remarks, Amrani said that the timing of the polls is a significant factor, as the Islamist position gains from events occurring in the region. Amrani said that if a poll was done tomorrow, the Islamist's numbers would increase given the situation in Lebanon and Iraq. Amrani argued, though, that the PJD does not have the expertise that more established parties like the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) or Istiqlal possess.

¶14. (SBU) Amrani emphasized that the 2007 legislative

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elections will be a "model for the region," as Morocco will witness its freest and fairest elections to date. The king has a vision for the country, is realizing this vision step by step, and the 2007 elections will be an important opportunity for the future of Morocco, Amrani said. In closing, Amrani asked if the political parties view polling as an important resource or as a way to manipulate information.

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